

Synopsis –

UNESCO's First Salvage Campaign – Nubian Monuments

It was the first U.N. 'salvage' project. A dam was to be built at Aswan in Egypt. When an employee of the Louvre saw what would be lost, among the edifices her favorite ancient temples, she sprung to action taking the matter to the United Nations and UNESCO in Paris.

The most complete book about the various stages of the project is *Temples and Tombs of Ancient Nubia* by Torgny Save-Soderberg who was active in the project.

Fifty countries issued stamps for the project with sales of First Day Covers going to the campaign. Much money was needed with many countries pledging support but neglecting to deliver on their promises. Through a love of the city of Paris Jacqueline Kennedy became involved in the project and she convinced her husband, then President Kennedy, to pledge for both the salvage project and construction of the dam.

The largest project, the temples of Abu Simbel, was last to be completed because many of the techniques used by VBB were invented on the spot and new saws were developed to cut the stones into pieces, number them and relocate the entire edifice, including the top of the mountain, to a higher site. Reconstruction was finally completed in the 1970s.

The most famous site was the temples on the island of Philae. The island could not be saved so nearby Agilkia island was re-configured to resemble Philae and the temples and structures moved there. This site is still being explored today with new discoveries and research being done after all these years. Italian engineers did the bulk of the work here.

Several of the other saved sites are on stamps and shown in the exhibit; Faras church excavated by Poland, Wadi es Sebu'a and the Drowning Sphinx; though a smaller "Temple of Horus" built by Amenophis III was lost. Among saved temples are Kalabsha, Dendura, Qertassi.

In order to save them; many temples were given to the countries in exchange for their assistance with the project by Egypt. Among them the Temple of Dendur which has resided at the Metropolitan Museum of New York since 1967, enclosed in its own glass wing. By the time it got here Lyndon Johnson was president but it still went to NYC and not Washington DC.

New stories about the project are discovered almost every day. Though UNESCO has done many more projects, the first remains the best in my opinion.